This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in Notes and Queries *following peer review. The definitive publisher-authenticated version* [Notes and Queries (2006) 53 (4): 464-467. doi: 10.1093/notesj/gjl158] *is available online at:* http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/content/53/4/464.extract.

LINKS BETWEEN *MUCEDORUS* AND *THE TRAGICAL HISTORY, ADMIRABLE ATCHIEVMENTS AND VARIOUS EVENTS OF GUY EARL OF WARWICK*

The play *The Tragical History, Admirable Atchievments and various events of Guy Earl of Warwick* was printed, for the first and only time, in 1661 by Thomas Vere and William Gilbertson. Though it is described on the title page as having been 'Acted very Frequently with great Applause By his late Majesties Servants', there is no known record of a performance of the play. The play is ascribed to 'B. J.', no doubt to give the impression that the author was Ben Jonson[1].

Despite its obscurity, the *Tragical History* may be a very important play. This is not because it has any special literary merits, but because it *may* contain a sustained sixteenth century reference to Shakespeare. If this were true, the *Tragical History* would allow us to add a significant new chapter to Shakespearean biography.

Alfred Harbage was the first to suggest that the *Tragical History* could contain a reference to Shakespeare. In 1941, he conjectured that, despite being printed in 1661, *The Tragical History* was probably written in the early 1590s, and that the play's Clown, called Sparrow, may be a 'hit' at Shakespeare[2].

The passage in the *Tragical History* that struck Harbage was this:

Rainborne. Art thou a Christian? prethee where wer't born?

Sparrow. Ifaith Sir I was born in England at Stratford upon Aven in Warwickshire.

Rainborne. Wer't born in England? what's thy name?

Sparrow. Nay I have a fine finical name, I can tell ye, for my name is Sparrow; yet I am not no house Sparrow, nor no hedge Sparrow, nor no peaking Sparrow, nor no sneaking Sparrow, but I am a high mounting lofty minded Sparrow, and that Parnell knows well enough, and a good many more of the pretty Wenches of our Parish ifaith.

Harbage argued that this passage with its specific reference to a 'lofty minded' Sparrow from Stratford upon Avon 'may be a glancing hit at Shakespeare, written when his mounting star was vexing new writers as well as old'. He suggested that the play was written ca. 1592-3.

There was no significant follow-up to Harbage's conjecture until 2001, when Helen Cooper expanded on his argument, adding the further intriguing speculation that Shakespeare may even have played the part of Sparrow himself[3]. She also agreed with Harbage that the play was probably written, or rewritten, in the early 1590s.

While there are indeed strands of evidence pointing to the *Tragical History* having been written during the early 1590s, they are largely based on inferences from style and subject

matter; there is no *hard* evidence at this stage for the date of composition. It is important to make this clear, because two recent biographies of Shakespeare state - without qualification - that the *Tragical History* was 'a play of 1593'[4]. This date may well be correct, but there is no warrant at this stage for stating it as a fact. We are still missing a firm basis for the date of the *Tragical History*.

Also missing to this point has been a clear link between the *Tragical History* and any other work of the period that would allow us to put the play within a firmer literary context, and perhaps help us with the problem of dating. My aim here is to show that there is one work that we can definitely link to the *Tragical History.* That work is one of the most famous plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods - *Mucedorus.*

In terms of popularity, *Mucedorus* could hardly be more different to the obscure *Tragical History*. First printed in 1598, *Mucedorus* was the seventeenth century's best-selling play, going through fifteen editions by 1642.[5] However, despite the differences in their history, *Mucedorus* and the *Tragical History* appear to be closely connected, to the point where we can, I think, be almost certain that the author of one play had the other very much in mind when writing his own work.

The plays have similarities in plot, characters and stagecraft. In *Mucedorus* we have a prince who disguises himself as a shepherd, then disguises himself as a hermit, then fights and kills 'a wild man'; in the *Tragical History* we have a knight who disguises himself as a palmer, then fights and kills Colbron [Colbrand], a giant, then becomes a hermit. In both plays, the Clown is a key figure: Mouse is virtually the main character in *Mucedorus*; Sparrow appears in all five acts of the *Tragical History*. Both plays are designed for a small cast[6].

More importantly, there are a number of extremely rare phrases that occur in both *Mucedorus* and the *Tragical History*. Significantly, these phrases (one actually a joke), though scattered in the *Tragical History*, are all found *in a single short scene* in *Mucedorus.*

The relevant scene from *Mucedorus* is shown below, with the corresponding text from the *Tragical History* shown in square brackets. The parallels have been highlighted in bold[7].

Clowne:
Heers throw the wods, and throw the wods,
to looke out a shepheard & a stray kings daugter, but
softe who haue we heere, what art thou?

Mucedorus:
I am an hermit.

Clowne:
An emmet, I neuer saw such big emmet in all
my life before.

[*Guy:*
Ye cowardly Rogue wilt thou kill a Hermit?

Sparrow:
An Emmot quotha, 'tis one of the fowlest great Emmots that ever I saw.]

Mucedorus:
I tel you sir I am an hermit, one that leads a solitarie
life within these woods.

Clowne:
O I know the now, thou art her that eates vp al
the **hips and hawes**, we could not haue one peece of fat
bacon for thee al this yeare.

[*Enter Sparrow:*
A Pilgrimage, quotha, marry here's a Pilgrimage indeed, why? I have lost my Master, and have been this fortnight in a Wood, where I have eat nothing but **Hips and Hawes**]

… [30 lines omitted]

Clowne:
Nay I say rush er and ile prooue mine office
good, for looke sir when any coms from vnder the sea
or so, and a dog chance to **blow his nose backewarde**,
then with a whip I giue him the good time of the day,
and strawe rushes presently, therefore I am a rusher, a
hie office I promise ye.

[*Sparrow:*
VVhy? I know if you hear my Masters name you'l **blow your Nose backward**, and then your Landresse will call you Sloven.]

Mucedorus:
But where shall I find you in the Courte?

Clowne:
Why. where it is best being, either in the kitching
a eating or in the butterie drinking: but if you
come I will prouide for thee a **peece of beefe & brewis**
knockle deepe in fat, pray you take paines remember
maister mouse.

[*Sparrow:*
Unch, How say ye? you would fain curry favour with me, but 'twill not serve your turn: Have ye ever an Ambry in your Cottage, where a Man may find a good Bag-pudding, **a piece of Beef, or a Platter of Bruis knockle deep in Fat**; for I tell thee old fellow, I am sharp set, I have not eat a good Meal this Fortnight.]

The rarity of these parallels makes it almost certain that they are not coincidental. The hermit/emmet joke[8] and the rather extraordinary phrase 'blow your/his nose backward' appear to be unique to these two plays. 'Piece of beef and brewis knuckle deep in fat', though not unique, is certainly rare[9], and 'hips and hawes' is uncommon. That all the parallels occur in the one scene in *Mucedorus*, and in each case the lines involve the respective clowns Mouse and Sparrow, simply underlines how unlikely it is that the parallels are coincidental.

If we accept these verbal links between *Mucedorus* and the *Tragical History*, it raises the question of what the direction of influence was: did *Mucedorus* borrow from the *Tragical History*, or did the *Tragical History* borrow from *Mucedorus*? And what are the implications of the direction for establishing the date of composition of the *Tragical History*?

The date of the *Tragical History* is critical to the argument that Sparrow is a hit at Shakespeare. If it turned out that the *Tragical History* was written at a comparatively late date, the less likely it would be that the author was satirising Shakespeare as 'a high mounting lofty minded *Sparrow*'. Certainly, by the seventeenth century Shakespeare's high reputation as both a poet and dramatist would have made such satire especially pointless.

For the Sparrow-as-Shakespeare argument to be correct, we would expect the *Tragical History* to have been written sometime in the 1590s when Shakespeare's reputation was still growing. The most likely time in that period for him to be satirised as 'lofty minded' would be around 1593-5, shortly after *Venus and Adonis* (and possibly *Lucrece*) had been printed.

Can the link with *Mucedorus* help us with the date for the *Tragical History*? Certainly, if *Mucedorus* borrowed from the *Tragical History* it would have the important consequence that the *Tragical History must* have been written before 1598, when *Mucedorus* was first published. This would place the *Tragical History* incontrovertibly within the period when a reference to a 'high mounting lofty minded *Sparrow*' from 'Stratford upon Aven' could readily be seen as a hit at Shakespeare.

However, the fact that the verbal parallels in the *Tragical History* relate to a single scene in *Mucedorus* makes it more likely that it was the *Tragical History* that borrowed from *Mucedorus*. This would also be consistent with the quality of the verse in each play. *Mucedorus* is written in an older, highly alliterative style (often to the point of parody e.g. 'When heapes of harmes do houer ouer head ', 'In harmful hart to harbor hatred long '), which suggests it pre-dates the *Tragical History*.

If the *Tragical History* borrowed from *Mucedorus*, it unfortunately does not give us any firm evidence for the date of the former. Since *Mucedorus* was first published in 1598, the *Tragical History* could have been written any time after that date, even well into the seventeenth century given the popularity of *Mucedorus* during that period. And an earlier date than 1598 for the *Tragical History* could still not be ruled out. It would not, after all, have been particularly difficult for the author of the *Tragical History* to have noted a few phrases from a single scene in *Mucedorus* from viewing a performance prior to the latter's publication in 1598.

While the assumption that the *Tragical History* borrowed from *Mucedorus* does not give us a firm guide to the date of the *Tragical History*, it does give us the basis for some interesting speculation. What was the author's motivation in borrowing so obviously from *Mucedorus*? It is, of course, possible that the borrowing could have been unconscious, or nothing more than simple plagiarism, but the blatant nature of the borrowing and its pointing to a single scene in *Mucedorus* raises the possibility that it may have been *deliberate*. That is, the author of the *Tragical History* may have been deliberately *pointing* the audience to the connection between the two plays.

Why would he do this? I speculate here that he may have done so for the same reason he spelt out that Sparrow was born in Stratford upon Avon – he wanted to make sure his audience knew that Sparrow *was* a hit at Shakespeare.

Despite being an anonymous work, *Mucedorus* could well have been associated with Shakespeare in the public mind. From the third quarto of 1610 we know that the King's Men performed the play; so some, and possibly all, performances of *Mucedorus* were by Shakespeare's company. As a result, the author of the *Tragical History* could reasonably have expected his audience to associate *Mucedorus* with Shakespeare[10]. If so, the link between *Mucedorus* and the *Tragical History* becomes something potentially far more important than a few verbal parallels. It becomes a link between Shakespeare and Sparrow.

JOHN PEACHMAN

Sydney

[1] Whether or not Jonson actually wrote the play is not a question I intend to address here.
[2] Alfred Harbage, 'An Early Attack on Shakespeare?', *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, xvi (1941), 42-9 and reprinted in modified form as 'Sparrow from Stratford', in his *Shakespeare without Words and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1972), 143-52.
[3] Helen Cooper, 'Did Shakespeare play the Clown?', *TLS*, 5116 (20 April, 2001), 26-7.
[4] Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* (London, 2003), 146. Also, Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London, 2005), 222 (quoting Wood).
[5] Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, lvi, Number 1, Spring 2005, 21.
[6] *Mucedorus* makes this explicit*:* 'Eight persons may easily play it'. Cooper states that the *Tragical History* could have been played by seven.
[7] Quotes are from the electronic version of each play in the Chadwyck-Healey Literature Online (LION) database. In determining the rarity of phrases, my primary source was also LION.
[8] The plays also share another joke which I cannot find elsewhere. In *Guy*, Sparrow asks at one stage 'is the King a Man or a Woman?'. In *Mucedorus*, Mouse asks 'Whats that same King a man or woman?'. In both cases, the question is apparently gratuitous, being used only as a lead-in to a subsequent joke.
[9] Thomas Becon's *A comfortable epistle* (1554) has the close parallel: 'eatynge beffe and brewes knucle depe'.
[10] In this context, whether or not Shakespeare actually wrote the play would be immaterial.